# ACTUALIZATION OF VALUES IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION BY IMPLEMENTING COMPETENCE-BASED LEARNING CONTENT

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Abstract. Since 2018, competence-based learning content is being introduced in educational institutions of Latvia focusing on interdependent development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. If values are actualized in the educational process, the child gradually develops understanding of values from an early age. Thus, value-oriented pre-school education creates preconditions for the continuous development of a responsible and tolerant society and contributes to the common values that determine its direction.

The aim of the study is to explore, based on the normative regulation of values in education, the actualization of values in the context of the implementation of competence-based learning content in educational institutions implementing pre-school education curricula. The study is based on the data analysis of the monitoring survey of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia on the implementation of competence-based learning content during the 2019-2020 school year. The study combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics as well as qualitative content analysis.

The analysis of the survey data shows that in the educational institutions that implement preschool education curricula, all values defined in the normative regulation, i.e., life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language and the State of Latvia, as well as other values set by educational institutions are actualized.

Keywords: competence-based learning content, Latvia, pre-school education, values.

# Introduction

The shared values that determine the growth of society are important in a democratic society despite the plurality of existing beliefs and values. Values are treated essential in the context of conceptualization of the competences enabling participation in a culture of democracy (Council of Europe, 2016).

Education is expected to be transformative and relevant to contemporary life and global challenges bringing shared values to life (UNESCO, 2016). OECD Learning Compass 2030 names the values alongside knowledge, skills and

attitudes as a key component in the vision for the future of education. Values influence people's choices, judgements, behaviour and actions in the path towards individual, societal and environmental well-being (OECD, 2019).

Postmodern world faces significant changes related to values like attempts to update traditional values to current conditions and overall chaos of values. The same values are questioned or recognized by different societal groups. Loss of the values unaccepted by society and in contrary, preservation of existing values or building new values reflect the bipolar validity of values (Knapik, 2020). Material values are often seen as superior to moral and spiritual values, thus causing risks of losing higher moral ideals and norms of a person and society.

In Latvia, the issue of values has become increasingly topical in recent years. The importance of education in development of societal welfare and necessity to reinforce the values in the educational process are emphasized in educational sciences and policy (Lidaka, Samusevica, & Striguna, 2013). Strong regulatory framework for integration values in education has been established recently. The 2015 amendments to the Education Law of the Republic of Latvia (Saeima, 1998) indicate the need for the moral upbringing of the learner in accordance with the values included in Satversme (the Constitution of Latvia). Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 480 of July 15, 2016 "Guidelines for Educating Learners and Procedures for Evaluating Information, Teaching Aids, Materials and Teaching and Educational Methods" (Ministru kabinets, 2016) determine the guidelines for the upbringing of learners, as well as the values to be actualized in education.

Since 2018, competence-based learning content is being introduced in educational institutions of Latvia. The project "Competency-based Approach in the Curriculum" implemented by the National Centre for Education, well - known in Latvia by its brand "School 2030", envisages the development, approbation and successive implementation of competence-based learning content and approach to learning at all ages from pre-school to secondary school. Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 716 of November 21, 2018 "Regulations on State Pre-school Education Guidelines and Samples of Pre-school Education Curricula" (Ministru kabinets, 2018) introduce the competence-based principles in preschool education. Values are treated to be very central within the competence-based learning content. Values shape a conceptual framework that permeates the entire learning content (Oliņa, Namsone, & France, 2018).

The necessity to study the actualization of values in the new curricular framework arises from the discrepancy between legislative requirements and educational practice. In pre-school education, the implementation of competence-based learning content was started in the 2019-2020 school year. However, many pre-school teachers note their unpreparedness to actualize values, a lack of

knowledge and common understanding of the conceptual content of values (Delijeva, 2018).

The aim of the current study is to explore, based on the normative regulation of values in education, the actualization of values in the context of the implementation of competence-based learning content in the educational institutions implementing pre-school education curricula. The following research question was posed: do the educational institutions that implement pre-school education curricula actualize values determined in regulatory documents and which values are the most actualized?

# **Theoretical Framework**

Values are defined as abstract goals or guiding principles in human lives. They represent criteria used by people to choose and justify their behaviour and valuate other people, themselves, and events (Schwartz, 1992). Values are phenomena studied in philosophy (axiology), psychology, sociology, anthropology as well as in education sciences. They can be conceptualized on the individual and group level. Thus, values characterize both individuals and social collectives, e.g., nations, organizations, or religious groups (Sagiv et al., 2017).

Axiology focuses on nature of values and the issue what 'ought to be'. In psychology, values are defined as internalized cognitive structures that guide choices by evoking a sense of basic principles of right and wrong (Oyserman, 2015). Values can be understood as cognitive representations of motivational goals (Schwartz, 1992) because of their broad, trans-situational nature. They affect people's preferences and behavior over time and across situations (Sagiv et al., 2017). From the perspective of social sciences, values are social standards that help individuals to live together within a society. In social psychology, two main sets of values, namely the terminal and instrumental values are distinguished. The terminal values refer to desirable and end-state existence, the goals that a person would like to achieve during their lifetime. The instrumental values refer to the means of achieving the terminal values (Rokeach, 1973).

Education promotes the acquisition of purposefully organised historical experience of the society including cultural values (Lidaka, Samusevica, & Striguna, 2013). When studying the temporal values in the educational context the definition of value from the sociopsychological perspective seems the most relevant. Values are characterized as scripts or cultural ideals held in common by members of a group (Oyserman, 2015). Values as the group's 'social mind' (ibid, 2015) underline the collective nature of shared values. Simultaneously, subjective attitudes and the degree of importance attached to a certain value by a person shape the individual nature of values.

In the educational process where values are considered significant, the child develops his / her understanding of values from an early age. Value-oriented preschool education creates preconditions for the growth of child's personality as well as for a responsible and tolerant society contributing to the common values that determine its direction.

Pre-school education practice should be based on the principles stemming from democracy as a value, i.e., to take into account children's views and be aware that children experience real opportunities to influence and participate in preschool education activities. Within daily practice, a pre-school teacher creates diverse and meaningful situations in which children can get the experience of how to be part of a group or community (Skriver Jensen & Brostrőm, 2018).

In pre-school education, a child acquires values during each activity. The child gets experiences on values from the surrounding environment, social contact and active engagement (Ülavere & Tammik, 2017).

The communication of values takes place both explicitly and implicitly. Actualization of certain values, e.g., freedom of choice, in large extent depends on teachers' personal values and their hierarchy (Ozola, 2017). Thus, in the teacher's self-analysis, special attention should be paid to the identification of intrinsic values. They shape the hidden curricular framework and may conflict with extrinsic values that are clearly defined in the learning objectives. Teacher's personal responsibility and high ethical standards are crucial to the implementation of a value-oriented educational process.

The role of the teacher is undergoing significant changes and becomes increasingly challenging concerning the actualization of values. The value-oriented educational process requires teacher's greater understanding of the content of values and methods of how to integrate values into the learning content and the entire educational process. In educational practice, the teacher faces a diversity of values, different value priorities and contradictions, which require the teacher to be prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas arising from value conflicts.

It is impossible for a teacher to be value neutral. The teacher implements the values in his professional activity constantly. In order to promote the learner's understanding of certain values, the teacher must have his / her personal understanding of values. The teacher should be professional in matters of values and prepared to meet value conflicts in daily communication (Johansson, 2018). An educational institution needs clear value standards and principles that support the actualization of values in the educational process (Delijeva, 2018). Clearly formulated values at the level of the educational institution and their integration into the curriculum make them visible. Thus, values become a subject of reflection and discussion among teachers (Skriver Jensen & Brostrőm, 2018).

Values are communicated both consciously and unconsciously in educational practice (Johansson, 2018). In pre-school education, the acquisition of values is reflected mainly in daily communication and activities. Values cannot be separated as an independent field of learning. The child starts to learn values by observing and imitating an adult, therefore a positive role model of an adult is especially important (Ülavere & Tammik, 2017).

The competence-based approach focuses on competence as a complex learning outcome that includes a value dimension. The new curricular framework requires shift of a paradigm both at individual and institutional level. The paradigm shift model should transform the learning by focusing on learner's competence, teaching, teacher's education and the role of the educational institution as a system (Oliņa et al., 2018). It can be concluded that the paradigm shift at all levels of the educational process creates preconditions for the actualization of values in pre-school education.

Recent education policy of Latvia emphasizes upbringing as an integral part of a purposefully organized educational process, the promotion of the learner's comprehensive development, including moral development and the formation of attitudes. The values that should be emphasized in education in order to promote learners' understanding, responsible attitude and appropriate action in accordance with the values, are life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language and the State of Latvia. The virtues to be nurtured are responsibility, diligence, courage, honesty, wisdom, kindness, compassion, moderation, restraint, solidarity, justice, tolerance (Ministru kabinets, 2016).

In pre-school education, the aim, objectives, the planned learning outcomes, and the basic principles for the implementation of the learning content and assessment of learners have also changed significantly. Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 716 of November 21, 2018 "Regulations on State Pre-school Education Guidelines and Samples of Pre-school Education Curricula" (Ministru kabinets, 2018) aim to educate a curious, creative, and joyful child who leads a healthy, safe, and active life, acts independently, learns with interest and joy, gaining experience about himself or herself, others, the surrounding world and the interaction therein. The guidelines introduce a competence-based approach to preschool education and are challenging for pre-school teachers as require new skills and significant changes in beliefs and attitudes. When compared with a previous regulatory framework, i.e., Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 533 of July 31, 2012 "Regulations on State Pre-school Education Guidelines" (Ministru kabinets, 2012), the unity of competences, transversal skills as well as values and virtues is fundamentally new approach in pre-school education of Latvia. Competence-based learning content in pre-school education should be based on development of values and virtues, transversal skills as well as knowledge, understanding and basic skills relevant to the subject areas. The importance of the

unity of the upbringing and learning process is emphasized in order to promote the development of values and value-based habits as well as virtues of the child.

In Latvia, the age of pre-school learners ranges from 1.5 to 7 years. Preschool education for five- and six-year-old children is compulsory.

### **Research Methodology**

The study is based on the data analysis of the monitoring survey of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia on the implementation of competence-based learning content during the school year 2019-2020. The survey was conducted in September 2020 using the *Limesurvey* tool of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Access to the online survey was sent to the official e-mails of all educational institutions implementing pre-school curricula. In order to obtain representative data the participation of 100% of educational institutions corresponding to the monitoring objective was expected. 788 educational institutions were represented in this survey that made up 80.90% of the educational institutions that implemented preschool curricula in the school year 2019-2020.

All planning regions of Latvia were represented in the survey. The educational institutions of Riga, the capital city, that formed the largest group of institutions (228 institutions), were additionally separated when comparing results by planning regions (see Figure 1).

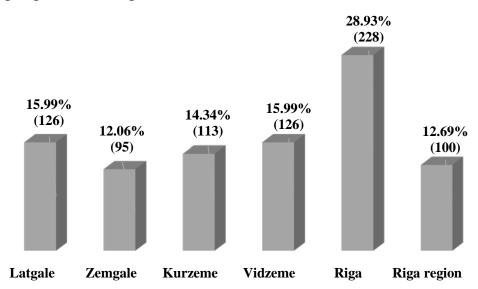


Figure 1 Distribution of the Respondents by Region: Percentage and Number of Educational Institutions

The distribution of the respondents by owner, type of the institution and location was analyzed (see Table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of the Respondents by Owner, Type and Location of the EducationalInstitution: Percentage and Number of Educational Institutions

Distribution by owner of the educational institution				ion by type onal institu		Distribution by the location of the educational institution		
	%	Number		%	Number		%	Number
Municipal educational institutions	87.69%	691	Pre-school educational institutions	71.45%	563	Institutions located in cities	61.55%	485
Private educational institutions	12.31%	97	Other educational institutions	28.55%	225	Institutions located outside cities	38.45%	303
Total		788			788			

The data revealed that the main part of the respondents were municipal educational institutions (691 institution of 788). 563 preschool educational institutions, 225 other educational institutions (elementary, primary and secondary schools and 1 institution for interest-related education) were among the respondents. The most of institutions were located in cities.

Each educational institution was represented in the survey once. The responses were mainly provided by the heads and deputy heads of educational institutions.

There was one question in the questionnaire related to the value actualization. Respondents were asked to assess which values defined in the educational institution were especially emphasized in the school year 2019-2020. Ten values defined in Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 480 of July 15, 2016 "Guidelines for Educating Learners and Procedures for Evaluating Information, Teaching Aids, Materials and Teaching and Educational Methods" (Ministru kabinets, 2016), namely life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, Latvian language and the State of Latvia were provided as the response options.

Respondents were also asked to provide general data about their educational institutions in order to further analyze the differences between municipal and private educational institutions, pre-school education institutions and other educational institutions implementing pre-school education curricula, institutions by their location in cities or outside and belonging to a certain planning region of Latvia.

Descriptive statistics such as absolute and relative frequencies and graphic analysis were mainly used. The data were also processed and analyzed in the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 using inferential statistical methods,

namely Cronbach's  $\alpha$  un Pearson's chi-square tests. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the textual responses. Thus, mixed-methods research design dominated by quantitative methods was chosen for the current study.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Prior to data analysis the internal reliability of the scale was measured. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ( $\alpha = 0.738$ ) indicates acceptable internal reliability.

The results of the research reveal that in the educational institutions that implement pre-school education curricula, all the values mentioned in the regulatory documents are actualized although the frequency of their choice differs significantly (see Figure 2).

The most emphasized values in pre-school education are the family and nature. Human dignity and the State of Latvia are also highly valued. Freedom and marriage are least actualized. It can be concluded that in pre-school education value issues are in the spotlight. All values except freedom and marriage are actualized by more than a half of the educational institutions (58.63 to 90.36%).

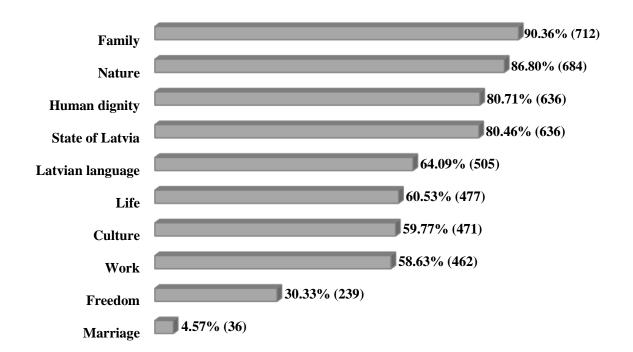


Figure 2 The Values Actualized in the Educational Institutions that Implemented Preschool Education Curricula in the School Year 2019-2020: Percentage and Number of Educational Institutions

Most respondents prioritize the family as a value. During the early years, the child is closely connected to his / her parents and other family members. Parents

are the first role models for children. By starting to attend the pre-school educational institution, the child reaches a new stage of socialization and his / her success to overcome the difficulties of adaptation depend largely on the experience gained in the family. Early childhood is a period in a child's life when parents are most present in the educational institution on a regular basis. Multifaceted partnership between the educational institution and family, high respect to diverse social and ethnic backgrounds of families as well as the significance of the preschool learning content related to the family reflects value of the family.

In the educational practice, the emphasis on nature as a value is underpinned by a variety of nature-based educational activities like ecologically-based curricula, forest education and outdoor practices that recently have become very common in early childhood education of Latvia. Responsibility for the protection of the surrounding environment and sustainability of nature and the environment has been prioritized (Ministru kabinets, 2016).

Freedom is one of the values mentioned relatively rarely. The education policy interprets freedom as an opportunity to pursue person's aspirations and goals without prejudice to the fundamental rights of other including freedom (Ministru kabinets, 2016). Although the understanding of the term emphasizes the self-realization of the child in the educational process it can be assumed that many respondents interpreted the term in the context of political freedom and independency.

Marriage is a value that has been excluded from the values to be actualized specifically in pre-school education (Ministru kabinets, 2018) and appears as the least actualized when analyzing the data from the survey. It can be concluded that in acquisition of values by young children the value of marriage is indivisible from the value of the family and does not require in-depth actualization.

The questionnaire provided an opportunity to mention other values of respondent's choice. Although only a small proportion of respondents (4.57%) provided textual responses, the main sets of values were emerging, namely moral, cultural and personality-related values. Responsibility, helpfulness, tolerance, restraint, compassion and kindness are the most mentioned moral values. Respondents indicated cultural values as folk traditions, the value of the native town and county, cultural traditions of the national minorities (e.g., Polish, Jewish). Purposefulness, autonomy and independence were most frequent among the personality-related values.

Further, it was determined whether there was statistically significant relationship between the choice of values and general characteristics of the educational institution like location in a certain planning region, the owner, type of the institution and location in city or outside (see Table 2).

Table 2 The Statistical Significance of the Relationship between the Actualized Values and
the General Characteristics of the Educational Institutions: Pearson Chi-square Test
<b>Results</b> (Assymptotic Significance)

Characteris- tics of educational institutions	Life	Human dignity	Freedom	Family	Marriage	Work	Nature	Culture	Latvian language	State of Latvia
Planning region	,003	,468	,000	,195	,127	,254	,589	,015	,000	,063
Owner	,547	,845	,280	,088	,415	,010	,369	,662	,038	,000
Type of the institution	,401	,263	,368	,650	,106	,048	,693	,229	,309	,838
Location	,207	,224	,208	,041	,768	,081	,084	,446	,088	,885

Pearson's chi-square test results reveal that there was no statistically significant relationship between the choice of values and location in cities or outside, nor the type of the educational institution.

The test showed statistically significant relationship regarding the planning regions and choice of values like the Latvian language (p = 0.000), life (p = 0.003), freedom (p = 0.000) and culture (p = 0.015). A significantly higher proportion of educational institutions emphasizes the Latvian language in Riga and Latgale region, life has been more emphasized in Riga region, Riga and Zemgale region, freedom in Riga and Riga region, and culture in Riga. Riga and Latgale are the regions characterized of the largest proportion of national minority curricula. It can be assumed that higher scores related to the Latvian language in linguistically heterogeneous environment. Similarly, culture can be assumed to be a value more typical for the city, especially the capital city, due to higher accessibility of cultural experiences in the educational institutions and outside.

There are statistically significant differences between municipal and private educational institutions in actualization of several values. Work (p = 0.010), the Latvian language (p = 0.038) and the State of Latvia (p = 0.000) are actualized by a significantly higher proportion of municipal educational institutions in comparison with private educational institutions.

The current study explores the values that refer to the temporal values, according to Rokeach (1973) while most of research on values conducted in preschool education focuses on moral values or, according to Rokeach, the instrumental values. Despite the diversity of preferences, the democratic, caring and disciplinary values are in the spotlight of preschools (Einarsdottir et al., 2015; Skriver Jensen & Broström, 2018).

The results provide an idea of the tendencies on emphasizing values in the educational institutions that implement pre-school education curricula. However,

it has been noted that the obtained data largely reflect the opinion of the administration of educational institutions. There is also a high probability of socially desirable responses.

Implementation of values in pre-school education requires further research. In order to analyze how values are implemented in educational practice it is important to obtain data from observations in the activities of individual preschool education teachers. Data triangulation will help to increase the reliability of research results and to reduce the influence of the perspectives of the administration and risks concerning socially desirable responses.

# Conclusions

In pre-school education of Latvia, the implementation of values is determined by strong regulatory framework as well as the basic principles for the implementation of the competence-based learning content defined in methodology underpinning the regulatory requirements. The competence-based learning content is based on the development of values and virtues, transversal skills as well as knowledge, understanding and basic skills relevant to the subject areas. The importance of the unity of the upbringing and learning process in promoting the development of values, value-based habits and virtues in the child is highly valued.

In the educational institutions of Latvia that implement pre-school education curricula, all values defined in the regulatory documents, i.e., life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language and the State of Latvia, as well as other values set by educational institutions are actualized. The frequency of the choice of values differs significantly. The most emphasized values are the family, nature, human dignity and the State of Latvia.

The actualization of values in the educational process depends mainly from teachers' understanding of values and their attitudes. Motivation to implement values is closely related to the personal significance of certain values in the teacher's hierarchy of values. Awareness of methods how to integrate values in daily activities is crucial in order to actualize values in a way that would be attractive and clear for every child according to his or her age and developmental stage. Teachers acquire new skills directly in the educational practice through teaching and learning simultaneously. Thus, teachers' ability of self-reflection becomes increasingly important among the pre-conditions in order to actualize values. It is important to include values in pre-school methodological work and to involve teachers in the development of teaching resources by promoting teachers' cooperation. Teachers attach greater importance to actualization of values when they themselves are actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities, regularly evaluate their own and colleagues' performance, share opinions and experiences. Teachers should also collaboratively develop criteria for self-assessment of their professional performance. Methodological activities focused on the implementation of values would help to shape teachers' attitudes and personal meaning and significance of values implemented in the educational practice.

Besides the teacher's professional competences, the self-actualization of the teacher as a personality becomes especially important when implementing competence-based learning content. The unity of values that are personally significant for the teacher and his / her personal and professional value orientation shape the moral basis and congruence of the teacher in the educational process, so that the teacher could be able to become a role model for children with his / her actions, behaviour, attitudes and values. Thus, the implementation of competence-based curricula envisages teachers to be motivated to develop their personalities which affects not only the professional field but personal spiritual growth in a broader sense.

In pre-school education, values permeate all fields starting with the simple daily communication between the teacher and the child. In turn, the values set at the level of the educational institution determine both the learning content and the choice of educational activities as well as the image of the entire educational institution in the community. Everyday educational practice requires the teacher's mastery to bring to life values that express the ideals of society or even humanity, while integrating values into simple, child-friendly and play-based activities, verbal and non-verbal expressions in ritual daily activities, clear everyday rules for children and the communication between children and adults characterized by mutual respect. It is important for teachers to use positive methods of upbringing and discipline, creating an emotionally supportive and safe environment where the child can freely express his or her views and act in accordance with his or her interests and needs. The values are also revealed by the layout of the educational environment, the involvement of parents in the development of the educational institution and the general orientation of the institution towards creative and childfriendly development.

To sum up, in the competence-based approach the value dimension can be understood as a conceptual framework that permeates the entire learning content and educational process. The surrounding environment, social contacts and active engagement shape the value experience of the child. Teacher's understanding of values, his / her professional and personal growth, responsibility and ethical standards determine the values that are transmitted explicitly and implicitly. In educational process, teacher's role is crucial for the development of child's values. Clear value standards and principles set in the educational institution promote the implementation of values. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference. Volume II, May 28th-29th, 2021. 715-728

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